



*By Sara Groves, Communications/Marketing Coordinator*

Most op-ed pages require submissions to be limited to around 750 words. Please contact your newspaper in advance of submitting an op-ed draft to find out the word limit, the preferred method of submission [email or fax are most frequent] and a name of an individual whom you can contact by phone both to ensure your submission arrived and to edit it, should it be accepted.

## Healthy Democracy Depends on Vital Libraries

By [Name of Author]

Only free countries have free libraries. In our faltering economy, with the fiscal health of every level of government in jeopardy, how will we be able to continue to support the right to free knowledge that is so vital to the health of our libraries and the people that our libraries serve?

Unfortunately, this is neither a theoretical nor hypothetical question. Libraries in almost every state are being impacted by budget cuts greater than at any time – including the Great Depression. The Salinas Public Library in California is slated to close this year. Library branches in Pennsylvania and New York have been closed. Here in Montana, libraries have cut staff and slashed operating hours – reducing access to a world of free resources and the expert assistance of library staff.

And yet the great irony is that as the economy worsens, libraries are more heavily used. That is certainly true here in (NAME OF COMMUNITY.) Since [NAME A MONTH, SAY HOW YOUR NUMBERS HAVE CHANGED] visits have increased [???] percent and circulation is up [???] percent, but we have had to [cut programs, cut hours, cut staff??? ADD TO YOUR STORY HERE.] [Has your library been giving more and better service with the same or fewer resources?]

Everyone loves libraries, but libraries can't live on love alone. Whether it's for story hours, job information for the unemployed, vital health care facts, Internet access, market research for starting or supporting a business, finding scholarships, planning travel, becoming a citizen, or simply curling up with a good novel, each library in America serves a wide range of needs in the information age.

Far too often, funding priorities for libraries have not reflected their demonstrated value to the

communities they serve. Despite this, there are few Americans who don't clearly understand the value provided by their public, school, and university libraries.

If people speak out, they can save their libraries. Libraries are among the most effective of all public services, serving more than 2/3 of the public with less than 2 percent of all tax dollars. What's more, libraries are an important part of the solution to the problems facing us – from unemployment to staying up to date on changing world events.

Libraries are a public good. Libraries enrich both the 67% of the public that regularly uses them each year, as well as the rest of the community that benefits from what those users have learned.

What, then, are our options?

The beauty and strength of America's libraries is that they are distinctive institutions that meet the unique needs of the communities they serve. Our local library's [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY] collection was selected and organized to meet our community needs. [Insert some specifics here about programming, your collection, or other ways your library specifically meets your community's needs.]

To ensure our libraries' futures, some communities will try bond issues. Others will seek the right blend of book sales and corporate philanthropy. Still others will apply for support at various levels of government. At the [NAME OF LIBRARY], we are [Insert information about your own fund raising efforts or tell a specific story of how you "get by."] We, as trustees, or friends of the [NAME OF LIBRARY] are confident that our community won't sit back and allow our library(ies) to eliminate or reduce services, programming, and resources.

Instead, we trust that the community will join us in demanding that its library(ies) get the funding that will enable it to continue to deliver the library services everyone needs to live, work, relax, and govern effectively!

The current economic climate is challenging for libraries. But based on the increased demand for what we offer, we expect no less than renewed public commitment and support, starting right here in [Name of City].

Name of Author and Title of library Board Member for identification, plus contact phone number. 